



STUDY FOUR

Law

Matthew 5:17-20

Introduction

From the previous study, Jesus said that His disciples should be like lights in the world, so that others may see their good works and glorify their Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). What are the good works? Matthew 5:17-20 begins the discussion on Christ's fulfillment of Scripture, the good works that come from obedience to Jesus and the standard of righteousness that Jesus is looking for.

For this week, the guide will use some historical details and word studies to wrestle with and unpack what Jesus is saying to His disciples. For the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:20 is likely one of the most astonishing verses up to this point. Hopefully, this is a thought-provoking and stimulating study for your group.

Group Study

1. Slowly read aloud Matthew 5:17-20 and hear Jesus' words to His disciples. In Jesus' context, the Hebrew Bible is divided into 3 sections: Law (or Torah which is the 5 books of Moses), Prophets and Writings (or Psalms). When Jesus says the Law and Prophets, it is shorthand for the whole Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament) and what His disciples would consider to be the entirety of Scripture. What are some initial thoughts and questions that come to mind as you read this passage?
2. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus clearly states that He is not abolishing the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The word "abolish" is also translated "destroy" as in Matthew 26:61. How do you feel about these verses? What is Jesus' attitude toward Scripture from this passage?
3. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says that He came to fulfill (*pleroo* in Greek) the Law and Prophets. The word *pleroo* has been used several times in Matthew before the Sermon on the Mount (read Matthew 1:22-23, 2:15, 2:17-18, 2:23, 4:14-16) –

what is the primary meaning of fulfilling the Law and Prophets? How does Jesus establish His divine authority and Messiahship?

4. Read Matthew 5:18 and Matthew 24:35, how does Jesus describe the permanence and enduring nature of God's Word?
5. From Matthew 5:19, Jesus is now pivoting to obedience to God's commandments and conformity to the true interpretation of the Law. Read Romans 8:3-4 – how did Jesus also fulfill the Law? How can we avoid being least in the kingdom of heaven? How can we aspire to be great in the kingdom of heaven?
6. Matthew 5:20 mentions the Pharisees. The word Pharisee comes from Aramaic meaning “set apart” and was one of the Jewish religious parties in Jesus' time. Pharisees emphasized a strict adherence to obeying the written and oral laws in order to achieve the righteousness of God. Interestingly, the Apostle Paul was a Pharisee (see Philippians 3:5). For Jesus' disciples and the crowds, do the Pharisees represent a high standard or a low standard of righteousness? Is Jesus increasing or decreasing the standard to enter into the kingdom of heaven?
7. Read Matthew 23:23. What were the Pharisees doing wrong? What is Jesus' advice to the Pharisees and does that surprise you?
8. Read Matthew 22:36-40 where Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. Compare these verses with Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14. How are the Law and the Prophets summarized? What is Jesus' standard of righteousness for His disciples? How is Jesus' standard higher than the Pharisees' standard?

Personal Reflection

1. What is your understanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament? How is the Old Testament still relevant to our lives today?

2. Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets – how is this significant to you and how would you share this with others?
3. Matthew 5:19 states “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” What kind of commandments do people tend to “relax” these days? How can we find the right balance?
4. How can someone have righteousness that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees? What practical steps can you take?

Prayer

